



DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

[4910-22-P]

Federal Highway Administration

Surface Transportation Environment and Planning Cooperative Research Program (STEP)

AGENCY: Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), DOT.

ACTION: Notice.

SUMMARY: Section 5207 of the Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU) established the Surface Transportation Environment and Planning Cooperative Research Program (STEP). The FHWA anticipates that the STEP or a similar program to provide resources for national research on issues related to planning, environment, and realty will be included in future surface transportation legislation. In Fiscal Year (FY) 2013, the FHWA expects to seek partnerships with other Federal agencies and tribes, State and local governments, and nongovernmental transportation and environmental stakeholders that can leverage limited research funding in the STEP with other stakeholders and partners in order to increase the total amount of resources available to meet the Nation's surface transportation research needs. The purpose of this notice is to announce the STEP implementation strategy for FY 2013 and to request suggested lines of research for the FY 2013 STEP via the STEP Web site at <http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/hep/step/index.htm> in anticipation of future surface transportation legislation.

DATES: Suggestions for lines of research should be submitted to the STEP Web site on or before [insert date 90 days after date of publication in Federal Register].

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Gabe Rousseau, Acting Director, Office of Human Environment, (202) 366-8044, Gabe.Rousseau@dot.gov or Seetha

Srinivasan, Office of the Chief Counsel, (202) 366-4099; Federal Highway Administration, 1200 New Jersey Avenue, SE, Washington, DC 20590. Office hours are from 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., e.t., Monday through Friday, except Federal holidays.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

Electronic Access

This document may be viewed online through the Federal eRulemaking portal at:

<http://www.regulations.gov>. Electronic submission and retrieval help and guidelines are available on the Web site. It is available 24 hours each day, 366 days this year. Please follow the instructions. An electronic copy of this document may also be downloaded from the Office of the Federal Register's home page at: <http://www.archives.gov/federal-register> and the Government Printing Office's Web page at: <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys>.

Background

Section 5207 of SAFETEA-LU (Pub. L. 109-59, Aug. 10, 2005), established the STEP in Section 507 of Title 23, United States Code. The FHWA anticipates that the STEP or a similar program to provide resources for national research on issues related to planning, environment, and realty will be included in future surface transportation legislation. The general objective of the STEP is to improve understanding of the complex relationship between surface transportation, planning, and the environment.

The SAFETEA-LU provided \$16.875 million per year for FY 2006-2009 to implement this cooperative research program. Due to obligation limitations, rescissions, and congressional designations of Title V Research in SAFETEA-LU, an average of \$14.5 million of the authorized \$16.875 million was only available each fiscal year to help implement the cooperative research program.

The STEP is the primary source of funds for FHWA to conduct research and

develop tools and technologies to advance the state of the practice regarding national surface transportation and environmental decisionmaking. In FY 2013, the FHWA expects to seek partnerships with other Federal agencies and tribes; State and local governments; and nongovernmental transportation and environmental stakeholders. These partnerships can help leverage limited research funding in the STEP and increase the total amount of resources available to meet the Nation's surface transportation research needs.

The FY 2013 STEP will support the implementation of a national research agenda that includes:

- (1) Enhancing knowledge of strategies and tools available to accelerate project delivery while improving environmental outcomes;
- (2) Conducting research to develop climate change mitigation, adaptation, and livability strategies;
- (3) Developing and supporting accurate models and tools for evaluating transportation measures and developing indicators of economic, social, and environmental performance of transportation systems to facilitate alternative analysis;
- (4) Developing and deploying research to address congestion reduction efforts;
- (5) Developing transportation safety planning strategies for surface transportation systems and improvements;
- (6) Improving planning, operation, and management of surface transportation systems and rights-of-way;
- (7) Enhancing knowledge of strategies to improve transportation in rural

areas and small communities;

(8) Strengthening and advancing State/local and tribal capabilities regarding surface transportation and the environment;

(9) Improving transportation decisionmaking and coordination across international borders;

(10) Improving state of the practice regarding the impact of transportation on the environment;

(11) Conducting research to promote environmental streamlining/stewardship and sustainability;

(12) Exchanging knowledge and strategies to improve performance-based planning and programming for transportation;

(13) Conducting research to identify, share, and test best practices to promote transportation and livability linkages;

(14) Disseminating research results and advances in state of the practice through peer exchanges, workshops, conferences, etc.;

(15) Meeting additional priorities as determined by the Secretary; and

(16) Refining the scope and research emphases through active outreach and consultation with stakeholders.

The FHWA is issuing this notice to: (1) Announce the STEP Implementation Strategy for the FY 2013 STEP in anticipation of future surface transportation legislation, and (2) Solicit comments on proposed research activities to be undertaken in the FY 2013 STEP via the STEP Web site. The STEP Implementation Strategy can be found at http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/hep/step/about_step/strategy/. That Strategy updates

information on the graphs and charts regarding historical planning and environment research funding, and adds information about the proposed FY 2013 STEP including proposed funding levels, goals, and potential research activities. We invite the public to visit this Web site to obtain additional information on the STEP, as well as information on the process for forwarding comments to the FHWA regarding the STEP implementation plan. The URL for the STEP Web site is:

<http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/hep/step/>.

The FHWA will use this Web site as a major mechanism for informing the public regarding the status of the STEP.

Authority: 23 U.S.C. 507.

OMB Approval for Specific Forms, Surveys, Questionnaires: Burden Statement

This collection of information is voluntary and will be used to identify potential research for the creation of a research plan for the FHWA STEP Program. Public reporting burden is estimated to average 30 minutes per response, including the time for reviewing instructions, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing the collection of information. No confidential information will be collected; therefore, no assurances of confidentiality will be provided. Please note that an agency may not conduct or sponsor, and a person is not required to respond to, a collection of information unless it displays a currently valid Office of Management and Budget (OMB) control number. The OMB control number for this collection is 2125-0627 (Expiration 6/30/14). Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden to: Information Collection Clearance Officer,

Federal Highway Administration, 1200 New Jersey Avenue, SE., Washington, DC
20590.

Authority: 5 CFR 1320.8.

Issued on: June 20, 2012

Victor M. Mendez
Administrator

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